

January 19, 2011
Sierra Club Canada

Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission undemocratic and unaccountable

Refusal to hold N.B. hearings on the future of the Pt. Lepreau reactor shows contempt and disdain for its citizens

The Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission (CNSC) is holding hearings today in Ottawa on the future of New Brunswick's Pt. Lepreau nuclear power plant. At issue is the proposed refurbishment of Pt. Lepreau's CANDU nuclear reactor, which New Brunswick health and environmental organizations are overwhelmingly against. Due to numerous well justified concerns, including safety, health, environmental and economic, they want the failed reactor decommissioned.

What's worse is these organizations won't be able to appear before the commission to state their opposition to the refurbishment scheme. The CNSC refused to hold hearings in New Brunswick, despite requests made by 21 organizations representing tens of thousands of citizens.

"Nuclear power is unsafe, uneconomic and unnecessary. You would have thought that losing 400 million dollars in the first 20 years of operating the power plant would have taught the New Brunswick Government a thing or two," said John Bennett, Sierra Club Canada Executive Director. "While the rest of the world is investing in renewable energy and energy efficiency, New Brunswickers could be mired in the past. It's time to stop this insane, dangerous failed industrial policy now."

Due to the costs of travel and accommodation, by holding the hearings in Ottawa the CNSC is virtually eliminating any meaningful opportunity for non-profit public interest groups, volunteer organizations, small municipalities and ordinary New Brunswick citizens to attend or participate. This is a most undesirable, undemocratic and unacceptable situation.

The New Brunswickers who can make it to Ottawa (at their own expense) won't even be afforded the right to make oral presentations before the commission. Only NB Power has been granted such a podium – a further snub to New Brunswickers.

The whole process is not only undemocratic, it is slap in the face of all New Brunswickers – who will be asked foot the \$1.4 Billion dollar bill (to the tune of \$2,000 each) to pay for cost overruns and years of delays in the repair of Pt. Lepreau. Even the NB Public Utilities Board says the project is a bad idea based on bad economics.

"If refurbishment of Pt. Lepreau is to proceed, it is New Brunswickers who will bear the risks and the economic burden associated with the project. So why aren't hearings being held in New Brunswick? Why are New Brunswickers being muzzled?" asks Gretchen Fitzgerald, Director of the Atlantic Chapter of Sierra Club. "It's no wonder CNSC is hiding in Ottawa. How could they face New Brunswickers in light of all these facts?"

- 30-

For more information, contact:

John Bennett, Executive Director
Sierra Club Canada

(613) 291-6888
jb@sierraclub.ca

Backgrounder: About the Atomic Energy of Canada Limited (AECL)

AECL's incompetence is legendary and the CANDU reactor may be the worst nuclear reactor ever made – it's the Ford Pinto of reactors. In case after case, the CANDU reactor has been beset with serious technical problems, malfunctions, egregious delays and huge cost-overruns (in the hundreds of millions of dollars).

AECL's work has been repeatedly marked by incompetence. In fact, several of AECL's projects have been outright failures and abandoned. Look no further than their disastrous multi-year efforts to produce the Maple reactor (which has helped create the isotope crisis). The reactors, which proved to be unsafe to operate, have been left to rust in the woods.

AECL's installation of the Lepreau reactor's 380 replacement calandria tubes, only to be followed by its embarrassed admission that the installation of these tubes had been a "mistake" and as a result they would all need to be "removed, adjusted and reinserted", might rightly be called a comedy of errors if it had not been so hugely time consuming, expensive and - from the perspective of reactor safety - so crucially important.

AECL's promise to create a "new prototype" of an "enhanced" CANDU reactor was yet another expensive, abandoned failure.

What's worse, the body overseeing AECL's boondoggles, the CNSC, is not independent or impartial. In fact it is plagued by political interference. Take, for example, the case of AECL's National Research Universal reactor at Chalk River. It too has been beset with a litany of problems over the years. In May 2009 when CNSC learned of serious technical difficulties at the NRU reactor - which led to a leak of heavy water into the Ottawa River - CNSC President Linda Keen ordered the reactor shut down. For her diligence she was fired and humiliated by the Harper government.

In conclusion, the one thing AECL can be relied on for is failure.